WITH THE C. L. B. BATTALION IN FRANCE

J. DUNCAN C. F.

"News of the World"
October 26. 1919

SOLDIERS' RE-UNIONS.

Around one of the oldest Field Marshals in the British Army last night sat 200 young and hefty fellows to celebrate the first re-union dinner of the survivors of the 16th Battalion of the K.R.R. (Church Lads' Brigade Battalion) formed in the opening days of the war. In proposing the toast of "The Battalion," Lord Grentell pointed out that he had nothing but praise for their splendid gallantry in France, notably at High Wood, Bullecourt, and Neuve Eglise. A famous general had told him that at the latter place it was to a large extent due to the gallant fighting of the battalion that the attempt of the German Army to force its way through to Calais was defeated.

S. F. Barnes.

WITH THE C.L.B.
BATTALION IN FRANCE

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A SMALL CONTRIBUTION OF THE CHURCH LADS' BRIGADE TO THE NEW ARMIES

OUR BATTALION.—THE 16TH SERVICE BATTALION, KING'S ROYAL RIFLES (CHURCH LADS' BRIGADE)

[Photo: Ward's [illegible]

With the C.L.B. Battalion in France

BY THE
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Chaplain to the K.R.R. (C.L.B.)

WITH FRONTISPIECE

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THIS little book does not pretend to give more than a short and (necessarily) incomplete account of the K.R.R.—the battalion raised from members of the Church Lads' Brigade, and widely known as "The Churchman's Battalion." The full story will be told, it is hoped, at a later day.

The Author dedicates his unpretentious record, with admiration and respect, to W. M. Gee, Esq., the founder of the C.L.B., and still its secretary and guiding spirit after twenty-five years of devoted service; and to his comrades of the K.R.R. (C.L.B.), who have shown in golden deeds that true religion spells self-sacrifice and the faithful observance of duty to God and King and Country.

FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked by the Author to write a Foreword to these vivid chapters on the Churchman's Battalion, and I do so with a real feeling of diffidence as well as pride. On the spiritual side—and with that I am chiefly concerned—I am bound to be diffident, because the real work has been done by the Chaplain and not by myself. There would be no excuse at all for such intervention as I am daring, if it were not for the general interest of the matter and the fact that very often if outsiders do not see most of the game, at least they can express an opinion which no personal modesty need under-estimate.

The formation and the maintenance of the Churchman's Battalion is of the highest importance in the way of experiment. Too often an idea has been prevalent despite

occasional outbreaks of muscular Christianity, that a definite religion is the privilege of women and children and does not consort well with the character of the real man. At least the Churchman's Battalion has shattered this stupid idea. The men who at the call of the C.L.B. enlisted in the 16th (Service) Battn. King's Royal Rifle Corps were not weaklings. Their record at home proves this. To take the highest possible place in Musketry, or to be the runners-up in the New Army Football Competition, suggests that the men who say their prayers can compare with the manliest of their brothers. To distinguish themselves in the field of battle is none the less gallant because the heroes of such distinction made their Communions before the fight and leave behind them a clean sheet for the period of their training.

The instinct of prayer and of fight go together.

But from a Church point of view the experiment is of even greater value, because it shows the working of a common

definite religious ideal, not among a chosen few, but in an area sufficiently wide from which to draw conclusions because at least 3000 men are involved. It ought further to be noted that these men for the most part had been trained from earliest boyhood in the Church's discipline and doctrine, because it is a principle of the Church Lads' Brigade that a Company exists only with a definite religious obligation.

The Battalion, then, gave Churchmen, more or less instructed, an opportunity in the New Army of practising their religion, and that opportunity was fully seized. The men were mostly of the lower middle or artisan type—mill operators, miners, mechanics, shopkeepers, clerks, schoolmasters, etc., with no other education than the elementary school affords and that which is learned in the sterner school of life. That is to say, they were the usual conventional and respectable British citizens, probably whose worst fault was the tendency to language more picturesque than polite.

Their Churchmanship may be described as of all sorts — Catholic, Evangelical, High, Broad, Low; but they were all alike in this, they were keen on their religion and proud to belong to the Church of England. The Catholics and Evangelicals attended the services in the Church Hut best, and it must be remembered that these services were entirely voluntary. The former were the better instructed, and outside these there was a considerable margin of men who had the habit of Church attendance, but who might have drifted away into indifference if it had not been for their previous training in C.L.B. Bible-classes and the atmosphere of the Churchman's Battalion. For these their military experience has been to deepen their religion, and, if one may venture to prophesy, to make them resolute Churchmen for the rest of their lives. They represent the type of man who only too often drifts away from the Church at the age of nineteen upwards, and most particularly after the event of marriage.

This bringing together of men of different schools led to no friction at all, but to a better understanding of one another, due largely to the tact of the Chaplain and to the absence of professional agitators.

There is no doubt that both at home and abroad, especially in the trying days when the Battalion had to face the fiercest fire, what the men's souls clamoured for was the Holy Communion. After that Evensong was popular; and the Church Parades, which were on liturgical lines, with the band to accompany the hymns and psalms and the Chaplain to say a few straight manly words, undoubtedly appealed. Throughout the year the attendance at the Holy Communion was from 150 to 200 each Sunday, and at Easter it rose to nearly 600. Seventy-five per cent. of the men were regular in their Communions. A few had escaped Confirmation, and these were prepared by the Chaplain and confirmed, some before they went to the front, some after they had got there.

Apart from the formal services of the Church a healthy atmosphere of religion was maintained. Prayer silences morning and evening in the huts at the men's own request were very helpful, and, wherever the Battalion was quartered, men of their own accord volunteered to help in the services of the neighbouring churches. The clergy of these have not only written gratefully of their help, but have informed C.L.B. Headquarters that the presence of these men in their parishes did more to draw the ordinary man to church and religion than anything else in their experience. The men were exceedingly generous, and insisted upon collections upon all other services except the official parade service! By this means their Church Hut was furnished and decorated, and thankofferings and gifts were made to the different churches near which they were quartered, and to many other objects, such as the Church Lads' Brigade Ordination Candidates' Fund.

This record is necessarily a dry one,

but it is a skeleton of the character upon which the Author has written up his story in live words. At least the experiment proves this: on the one hand, that the real manly man wants religion and has found it in the discipline of the Church of England when it has been administered with sympathy as well as strictness; and on the other hand, that religion fosters the spirit of brotherhood, of discipline, of self-sacrifice and duty which is the very foundation of the soldier, who is serving not because he is forced, but because he is patriotic. Freedom and not militarism is the outcome of the Church and the Army.

How much of all this is due to the Church Lads' Brigade no one but the men themselves can adequately acknowledge. In its ranks they learn to be Churchmen, and, being Churchmen, to suffer if need be for King and Country, and in duty hard or simple never to be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified. From the front the Author wrote of this Churchman's Battalion—

"I give it as my firm and honest opinion (and I speak from a somewhat unique experience of the C.L.B. both before and during the war) that the Church of England has no better system for retaining our lads and inculcating true religious and Church principles than the C.L.B. The strength of the C.L.B. lies in the fact that it builds on a religious foundation, and that everything else is subordinate to the great object of turning lads into men of high character formed by prayer and sacrament and the practice of the Christian virtues."

And because that is true, this Foreword would send out his book with the hope that it may be widely read and its lesson deeply learned, while it remains a happy record of one of the noblest battalions in the British Army of to-day.

EDGAR ROGERS.

CHURCH LADS' BRIGADE,
HEADQUARTERS.

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WITH THE C.L.B. BATTALION IN FRANCE

CHAPTER I

GOING TO THE FRONT

A DAMP morning in November, muddy underfoot, and a cold, biting wind. Men march almost noiselessly, and there is little or no conversation. Packs become heavier—what a household is carried in these military bags strapped on broad shoulders!—but not much notice is taken of that. Each man is busy with his own thoughts. It would be interesting to know what these are. For we are going to the front. To the front at last! The long training is over, and soon the test will come. It hardly seems possible. But so it is, for here in the station is the

train waiting to take us to Southampton. Although it is two or three hours after midnight — when most good people are sleeping soundly in their beds — a few friends have come to say "Good-bye," and to wish good luck to those who go forth with brave hearts to answer the country's call.

There is a warning signal from the guard; men take their seats; the engine gives a shrill whistle, and we are off on the first stage of the journey.

Everybody seems rather sleepy. Conversation still hangs fire, and what there is has nothing at all to do with the front or fighting. It is so difficult to realize that the battalion actually is going to France. Some may try to get hold of that not unimportant fact. The majority turn their thoughts to more immediate things. Wise men!

Southampton is reached, and we tumble out of the train—a thousand and more of us.

"When will the boat sail?" we ask.

"Some time to-night," answers the Man-on-the-Spot carelessly.

"Not till to-night! But what are we to do till then?"

"Stay about here, I suppose," says the same indifferent individual. It is all right for him; he isn't going to the front. But he is a true prophet, and we learn definitely that there are twelve long hours in front of us before the good ship sails.

The men are relieved of their packs but have orders not to leave the dock side. Hot tea and food make the world a little brighter, and look! here are all sorts of famous vessels, and many curious things going on. "Why, there is the ——" (naming one of our largest liners) cries an observant Tommy. "See, it's fitted up as a hospital ship." "And there is ——" exclaims another. And so on. After all the day is not to be so long, and in truth it speeds away much more quickly than at first seems possible.

The officers are more fortunate than

the men. By means of a special permit they are allowed outside the dockyard gates, and find a comfortable hotel close by. Breakfast is served in quite regal style, and is grateful and comforting. The Old Campaigner, smoking his pipe after a substantial meal, makes a happy suggestion from the depths of a roomy armchair. "Better have a hot bath," he says; "goodness knows when we shall get another." It was the first hint that what we thought were the mere necessities of civilization might be denied us "over there." So we thanked the Old Campaigner, and got ourselves into hot water. At any rate we should arrive in France like good, clean Englishmen.

It was after this we had our big disappointment. The number of officers had to be reduced by four, by order of the military authorities. The news was broken as gently as possible to the affected officers, and like the good sportsmen they are, they put the best face upon it. They smiled cheerfully as they left us to re-

turn to the home camp. But it was easy to see how keenly they felt having to remain behind whilst their comrades went on to the trenches. However, orders, especially if they are military orders, must be obeyed. And at least they went off with a stiff upper lip.

The eventful day wore on, and the shadows had lengthened when the "fall in" was sounded. The whole battalion was drawn up in one of the big dock-yard sheds ready to march off to the ship waiting to take it over the waters. The hoarse commands of non-commissioned officers had just ceased when, without warning, the clear-cut notes of a cornet rang out. "Keep the home fires burning" was played with a delicacy and sympathy that touched the hearts of all who heard it. The chorus was sung with a feeling that was reverential. Not more solemn is the vesper hymn in church. For the first time most of us realized—it had come dimly at last—that we were leaving the shores of dear old England, and that many,

alas, would not return. If voices trembled a little as the chorus was sung for the last time it was no shame. There was never any indulgence in weak emotionalism or false sentiment.

"Company, 'tion! By the right, quick march!"—orders are rapped out again, and here are the men mounting the gangway. Each man is given a lifebelt in case it might be needed. Mines and German submarines, you know! There is a rattling of chains and cables, the good ship dips forward as if bowing its farewell to the shore, and soon it is rolling gently in the calm blue waters of the Channel. Save for the swish, swish of the swirling waters made by propeller blades, all is quiet and peaceful.

"Do you feel that you are actually going to the front at last?" I ask man after man as he stands or sits on deck. The question is put perhaps a hundred times, and in every case the reply is "No, sir." Many add, "It just seems as if we were going on a trip, or moving our

camp to some other place in England." We joke and we laugh, and what serious thoughts there are, we keep to ourselves.

Suddenly there comes a queer scraping sound. The ship gives a throb that is felt in every part of her, and then stops dead. Men spring to their feet and stand looking at one another.

"What has happened?" they cry.

"Submarines," whisper some.

It is nothing of the sort. The captain had reason to stop the ship for a few minutes, but no hostile craft had made him do it. Those on board were a little disappointed. They had hoped to see a German submarine placed on the inactive list, anxious, so to speak, for their first scalp. The excitement of a possible submarine hunt caused some diversion, and a few ardent warriors remained on the look-out in the hope that something would turn up. Nothing, however, happened, and so all settle down again: some to sleep; some to talk in whispers under the stars that twinkle overhead; some to watch the

strange things that happen at sea during the night in war time.

The morning light is breaking when the engines slow down and the gallant ship is drawn up alongside the quay at Havre. Three youngsters in a rowing boat steer an erratic course to the vessel. The soldiers watch them curiously. They are the first natives seen so far. The small boat bumps against the larger craft. The boys look up at the khaki-clad heroes and give them greeting. "Bon jour," they cry in the tone of those who wish to be friendly.

"Good morning," replies Mr. Atkins.

"Good mornin'," said the little chaps. Then plaintively: "Bully beef for garçon, compris?" Mr. Atkins shakes his head.

"Me sing 'Tip'rary,'" says Master Frenchman—the tallest one of the three, with smiling eyes. He sings something about it being a long way to Tip'rary. It looked as if some tins of bully beef changed hands when the vocalist had finished. But perhaps one's eyes deceived

one, as there is an order that "bully" must not be given away. Then somebody on board made a discovery.

"Boys," he shouted loudly, "bless me; why, here we are in France at last."

It was quite true. We were in France —at last.

CHAPTER II

IN FRANCE

"We are some of the K.R.R.,
We are some of the boys,
Mind all our manners,
Spend all our tanners,
We are respected wherever we go.
When we're marching through the village street,
Doors and windows open wide,
All the girls begin to cry,
The K.R.R. are passing by;
We are some of the boys."

WITH variations the above has become a sort of universal song in the New Army. The tune would fail to satisfy the fastidious master of music. But it has a good lilt about it, and it pleases Tommy. He sings it with a will, and his officers are not above following his example. So it was no surprise when the 16th K.R.R., swinging through the

streets of France for the first time, sang the old refrain lustily for the benefit, it may be presumed, of the friendly Allies who greeted the newly arrived troops with a welcoming smile as they went by.

Mr. Atkins was all eyes and ears. Curiously he looked round at the new and novel scenes, and wondered about the strange tongue he heard spoken. He could not make out the greetings shouted to him occasionally. Warm hearts, however, speak a language of their own understood by all. And when a kindly Frenchman distributed apples, he was voted "a good sort," and Mr. Atkins knew that France welcomed him as a friend and a brother.

"Where are we going?" said the Man-who-always-asks-questions.

"To a rest camp up the road," answered the Man-who-always-knows.

"How far is it?"

"Miles and miles and miles." The Knowing Man smiled as he spoke, and we all knew he was "pulling our leg."

Still the distance seemed long, as men were hungry, and packs were burdensome. On the way we see a pair of goalposts, and that cheers us a little. Things are not going to be so bad after all if one can indulge in beloved football. A few minutes later and the Rest Camp is reached. A veritable haven of rest! Washed and fed, the weariness vanishes like a dream of the night, and never did tent seem so comfortable.

Mr. Atkins has been foraging for himself—successfully. He makes known his find.

"There's a Y.M.C.A. hut," he cries, "and you can get lots and lots of grub."

The hut is large, and the food supplies are tremendous. But the hut, had it been twice the size, would not have been big enough that day. Men tumbled in right and left, and swarmed round the counter.

"Bread and butter, please."

"A pot of cocoa, mum."

"Another packet of Woodbines—and thank you."

"Have you any bootlaces? All right, give us a pair."

Busy hands and unfailing courtesy win the day. The hungry army is satisfied, although the bread and butter did run short, and there were requests for some extra minutes when closing time came. The manager told the writer that the takings constituted a record. He and his staff are to be congratulated on the success of their work. They are indeed Tommy's Very Good Friend.

The next morning brings another move.

"Where are we going to this time?" inquires the Man-who-always-asks-questions.

"You'll find out all in good time," raps out the Man-who-always-knows. When he says a thing like that in that very decided way he has, you know it is no use talking further. You must wait and see.

Hullo! here we are at the railway station, and here is a train of considerable length placed at our disposal. Evidently

there are not sufficient carriages to go round during war time, for the best part of the train is made up of cattle trucks. Commodious cattle trucks, too. Between thirty and forty men scramble into each, packs and all, with much pleasant badinage as they do so. It is a joke at first, but a joke that has, perhaps, lost its full flavour before the journey is finished.

All that day and right through the night the train crawls along. Surely it has been told the story of the tortoise and the hare! Occasionally it stops altogether (in this way differing from the tortoise), and we get out and exchange views and drink cocoa and eat whatever has been provided. Sometimes men do not return to the cattle trucks immediately. They run alongside the train, and only take their seats again when the blood is circulating more freely in their veins. For twenty-three hours we sat and stood and slept and shivered.

"Is this really active service?" said

the Man-who-asks-questions, waking up suddenly.

"No! it is inactive service, worse luck," replied Someone, wrestling with stubborn cramp.

But all things come to an end at last, even a twenty-three hours' ride in cattle trucks. Eventually, tired and stiff, we got to ——, and all were more than pleased. Outside the railway station the battalion was drawn up, and left to itself for an hour or so. We look round at the flat, rather desolate countryside, and speculate on many things. In the distance we hear the booming of heavy artillery and wonder how long it will be before we go into the trenches. Then there is more stir and movement; orders are shouted out here and there, and joy! we are on the march again, stretching our cramped limbs and buoyed up by the thought of a comfortable billet, food, and a bed.

"Where are they going to put us all?" —the Man-who-asks-questions is at it

again. The Man-who-knows stifles a yawn : a big one.

"Officers in houses (if they are to be got) ; men in barns, stables, lofts, cottages, schools, and any habitable place over or under the earth."

In time everyone is settled even as the Knowing Man has said. The villagers are hospitable, and provide a liberal supply of straw for those in barns and lofts, etc. It may sound very cheerless, but in sober truth a straw bed with blankets above and beneath, and four good walls and a roof—the cracks acting as natural ventilation holes—to keep out the rain and cold, make a comfortable sleeping-place. Ask Tommy about it and judge for yourself.

The Old Campaigner and I share a bedroom with one bed, and not sufficient room otherwise to swing round the proverbial cat.

"We'll toss for the bed," said the O.C.

"Not if I know it," I replied. "It's highly, ahem! immoral—the tossing, I

mean—and I prefer a sound floor to an uncertain mattress."

There was just space to lie at length on the floor, and with a little manœuvring one could avoid catching one's shins against the wash-hand stand.

"What we want," said the Old Campaigner, "is a wash, a change of clothes, slippers, and then supper."

"And after that a bed," added I.

All these good things came in turn.

Our French hostess was a kindly dame who spared no pains to make us comfortable. A bright, warm kitchen and well-cooked food worked wonders, so that even the twenty-three hours' railway journey became only a pleasant memory. But how tired we were! The Old Campaigner sought his bed early, and was soon in the Land of Dreams. I got into my sleeping-bag and stretched myself on the hard floor.

Why, how warm and cosy it was! Surely the O.C. would be wanting to change places. But I should not allow

it, I——. "Hullo!" Someone is shaking me vigorously.

"Get up," says a voice. It is the Old Campaigner.

"What for?" I turn over resolved not to move.

"Because," said the O.C. sternly, "you have already slept for fourteen hours, and the breakfast is on the table."

"Good gracious! you don't mean to say——" I look at my watch. "You are quite right. H'm. I suppose I must get up."

"You must," decidedly and uncompromisingly. So I extricate myself from the sleeping-bag and miss the wash-hand stand by inches.

Later in the day I find Mr. Thomas Atkins already settled down and very much at home. He says it is "très bon," and declares there is nothing better than a straw-lined barn for sound slumber.

"Did you really sleep well, Thomas?" inquires the Man-who-asks-questions.

"Sleep, sir? I should think so. I slept the clock round, and so did every single man in the platoon."

"And what did you think of the train journey?"

"Might have been worse, sir. Mustn't forget we're in France, and on active service now, you know."

Here was another discovery. Of course we were in France, and on active service, too.

CHAPTER III

IN BILLETS

THE Man-who-always-knows was in a communicative mood.

"You ask me," he said, "when we shall go into the trenches. Not for some weeks yet. Meanwhile we shall explore the beauties of rural France. We shall be as men without a home, and we shall tramp from village to village seeking one. If we behave ourselves we may get a week in some place where there are more houses than one; if we are extremely lucky we may remain two weeks, or even three, in a village that bears the marks of modern civilization."

"A Wandering Jew existence," murmured the Senior Sub. softly; "how very jolly."

"Better reserve judgment till you've

tried it, my son," said the Old Campaigner, with a grim smile.

For nearly two months on end we tried it, and found it quite an entertaining experience. There was all the charm and novelty that change brings, even though we got a little tired of long marches with heavy packs. Our "household gods" were carried religiously wherever we went.

In eight weeks we were in as many different villages, all of which bore a strong family resemblance. For the most part the people were hospitable, and ready to make friends with Mr. Atkins, who heartily reciprocated, and soon made himself at home. It is wonderful the way he adapts himself. Nothing seems to put him out, and his cheerfulness is extraordinary. Talk of Mark Tapley! The Army is full of double-strength Mark Tapleys! Of course the soldier man "grouses" not infrequently. But it is invariably at the small and unimportant, and never at the big things that really matter. His "grous-

ing" means no more than the engine blowing off steam. Also it is one of the privileges to which he clings tenaciously for better or worse.

One might have thought the language would have troubled him. Not a bit of it. In a way that is all his own he makes his wants known, and generally gets what he requires. More than one officer diffident about "speaking French" leaves it all to Tommy. And Tommy never fails. But he has his own views about the language.

"They say," said a loyal Lancastrian confidently, "that French is the easiest language in the world. Rot! Give me Lancashire; anybody can understand that!"

In each village the N.C.O.'s and men are lodged in cottages, barns, lofts, stables, schools, and similar places. There is nothing grand or palatial about any of them, but, bless you, Mr. Atkins doesn't mind. He makes the best of everything, and has confessed he would be happy sleeping on a clothes-line!

It is a big job finding the necessary accommodation for a battalion. In addition to the men, suitable places must be found for the transport, the Q.M.'s stores, the doctor, the Orderly Room, Guard Room, Officers' Mess, etc. Two officers generally share a modest bedroom, more often than not with only a single bed. In that case the floor must serve as a sleeping-place for one of them.

Billeted in a French village, life goes on with much tranquillity, especially if the men are "resting"—that is, if they are out of the trenches after a long spell there, and are some miles behind the firing line. It was our luck to be seldom within hearing of the guns, and we thought of the trenches in the casual way that marks those who think they will never see them. Even the Old Campaigner was not much better than most men.

"It is really difficult to imagine we are here for war," he said one day when we had been touring France for over a

month. "Life goes on pretty much as it did in England. Parades, guards, lectures, rifle practice, route marches, and all the rest of it."

"So that," broke in the Senior Sub.—and there was the suspicion of a chuckle—"the Wandering Jew existence is rather jolly."

"You wait, my son," answered the O.C. calmly; "you haven't seen the end of this sort of thing yet."

"Can anyone say just when the end will come?" put in the Man-who-always-asks-questions.

No one replied. Even the Man-who-always-knows was silent.

. . . . .

One day we got a grim reminder that we were indeed on active service, and that Death claims his soldier victims out of the trenches as well as in them. A sentry examining his rifle in the Guard Room by the light of a fire, accidentally pressed the trigger, and shot a comrade who was resting in a corner of the room.

The bullet entered the unfortunate man's body, and inflicted a fatal wound. Death came a few minutes later. The poor fellow was killed without ever having been in a trench, fired a shot or seen a German. At night, in a drizzling rain, he was buried under the tall trees in an orchard, and over the grave was placed a cross; a solemn symbol of the victory of Life over Death. Our first loss, it made a great impression, and regret was sincere and general.

Apart from this sad event life went on evenly and comfortably. It was really very much like what we had been used to in England. And there was so much to remind us of home. Every day the postman—the most popular man in the battalion, with the possible exception of the cooks—brought heaps and heaps of letters and parcels. The Post Office people were in despair.

"This battalion," they cried, "receives more letters and sends more letters than any other battalion in the Army."

The battalion remained unrepentant, and the postman retained his popularity.

"Pa-per! Eng-leesh pa-per!" Small French boys and girls piped out the cry in every village, and brought us all the London daily newspapers a day after publication. For the halfpenny papers we paid 1½*d.*, and 2½*d.* for those sold at home for a penny. Cigarettes from reputable English firms were provided free every week, we found, by a kind-hearted Government. So we smoked our cigarettes and read our papers just as we had done regularly in the olden days in England.

True to the old and sound belief that a soldier fights best on his stomach, the food supplied is abundant and of good quality. The Old Campaigner admits he has never seen anything like it. Bacon, mutton, beef, bread, jam, butter, tea, biscuits, "bully," stewed fruit, boiled puddings, and goodness knows what else besides. Mr. Atkins feeds well both in billets and in the trenches. The cakes

and other good things from home are always welcome. But they are supplementary only; they are luxuries and not necessities. Men at the front don't lose flesh. They put on weight like a Christmas turkey, and most of them are better in health than ever before in the piping days of peace.

Then during those eight weeks of our first French tour there were many other things to prevent us from becoming dull. Football matches, for one thing. Exciting games, too. More shouting when a goal is scored than when a German aeroplane is brought down! Fact, I assure you. Concerts were held whenever a suitable building could be found: not an easy matter, unfortunately. A real pierrot troupe, dressed in orthodox pierrot fashion, gave one of the best entertainments we have seen. How these soldiers on active service got together the costumes and the programme is "wropt in mystery." But they managed it somehow, to the huge delight of a brigadier,

a brigade-major, a lieutenant-colonel, many other important officers, and an enthusiastic crowd of Tommies. It made memorable the Christmas Day of 1915 spent in billets at the front.

Good Fortune brought us to a big French town a few days before the battalion went into the trenches for the first time.

"Ever seen a Charlie Chaplin film?" asked the Old Campaigner.

I had to confess my education had thus far been neglected.

"You'll see one to-night," said the O.C.

"Where?" said I.

"Here in ——. There's a play at the theatre, and also pictures of the 'one and only Charlie'—vide bills. We'll go together."

We went. And there in a theatre capable of holding over a thousand persons—and taxed nightly to its utmost capacity with soldiers—was seen a Charlie Chaplin film, what time the house rocked with laughter. The play, produced and

played by soldiers for soldiers, was also highly diverting. Every week the programme is changed, and the actors—mostly "professionals," who have left the stage at home to play their part in the real drama of life and death on the Western front—do their best, with deserved success, to hearten and amuse their audiences and make them forget for a time at least the trenches and shells and bombardments and the crafty Boches.

"It's an amazing thing," said the Old Campaigner musingly, as he smoked his cigar after dinner that same night.

"What is an amazing thing?" prompted the Man-who-always-ask-questions, as the O.C. paused to knock the ash off his cigar.

"This war," went on the O.C. "Here we have been running round France for the last eight weeks. We have lived pretty much as usual, and now we are in a town with big hotels where you can get a dinner equal to anything in London. The

shops are doing a roaring business, and will supply you with anything you like within reason. At night the whole place is lit up, although towns and villages in England are plunged into Cimmerian gloom." The O.C. looked at his cigar reflectively for a minute or two. "Then, to-night," he continued, "we go to a theatre run by Tommies for Tommies. It's excellent fun, for which you pay thirty centimes unless you're an officer, when it is your privilege to pay one franc. We come back to a good dinner and a comfortable bed."

As he spoke there came the dull roar of big guns in action.

"And less than five miles away are the German trenches."

The big guns roared again.

"We are at war, sir, then," said the Senior Sub. "This life in billets must stop soon, I suppose?"

The O.C. nodded assent. "Life in billets is rather jolly, after all. Better make the most of it, m' boy. This spell,

at any rate, will soon be over. On Sunday we go up to the firing line."

"The firing line on Sunday! I say, sir, that will be rather jolly, too, won't it?" The Senior Sub. waited expectantly, a smile on the boyish face. But no one spoke.

And again came the dull roar of big guns in action.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE FIRING LINE

It is the first Sunday morning in the New Year. The Churchman's Battalion is drawn up in full marching order. Officers and men are cheerful enough, but there is a certain restraint not noticeable on ordinary occasions. This is no ordinary occasion. It is indeed the most critical day in the lives of many standing there in the pale light of dawn, waiting orders to move. No one knows what the day will bring forth; few could have guessed all the horrors it was to bring before the sun again set in the lowering sky. Sunday, a day of sacred and peaceful associations, was to be turned into a day of storm and bloodshed, destruction and death. It is a mercy the future is veiled.

There is a tense feeling as the men march away, but little is said about the object that incites it. They are going into the firing line for eight long days, and they will match themselves against an unscrupulous foe, who stops at nothing and glories in his shame. Not all will come back who pass along that winding road, setting out so strong and courageous and with the easy confidence of youth. Who will be taken and who will be left? None can answer, and if he could it were well, perhaps, to be silent. Yet what misgivings there are remain unspoken. Instead, there is whistling and singing, light-hearted chaff, the joke and ringing laughter. An Englishman does not carry his heart on his sleeve even when he goes into battle.

"Halt!" The youthful warriors—their average age is less than twenty-one—stop for a few minutes to rest. They are not more than two miles from the trenches, and the screaming of shells can be distinctly heard. But they are

much more interested in small boys and girls, tiny tots some of them, who have baskets containing all sorts of good things. "Chocolate," "Oranges," "Apples," "Cakes," "Cigarettes," cry the little vendors in turn. Tommy is a profitable customer; he buys freely, and is not too critical over the change he receives.

"Quick march!" Along the road again. There are not so many people about now, and here and there one sees a house with gaping holes in roof and walls, and all the windows broken. The Boches have scored heavily. A father and mother killed and children made orphans and homeless. But they cannot break the pride of France, nor make even the humblest citizen falter in his resolution. Not more than a few hundred yards from the trenches, and swept almost daily by German shells, are villages full of men, women, and children—ah! these little children—living their ordinary lives and doing their usual work, realizing the

danger and scorning it. The gay boys, as they march to the firing line, take mental note, and they set their faces like flint and steel their hearts. It won't be their fault if the women and children, at least, go unavenged.

And now comes another halt—the last one before the trenches are reached. There is a flash of a gun, followed by a loud explosion, and in a minute or two there is a second flash and a second explosion. The artillery is already hard at work, and the infantryman, as he rests, looks round him. He knows the big guns are close by, but he cannot locate them, so cleverly are they hidden. The German, from observation balloon and aeroplane, has also tried to find them and failed. Thank heaven for that!

There comes a shrill, whistling, long-drawn-out sound that causes one to shiver as though cold water were running down one's back, and makes the waiting soldiers instinctively "duck." It is an enemy shell, and it lands in a field a few yards

away, ploughing up the soil, but doing no damage otherwise. Still, it is unpleasant to have "Jack Johnsons" so near, and the men are not sorry to go off to the cover of the communication trenches.

The trenches at last! They are narrow and muddy, and it is a difficult job to get through them with full packs. If two persons meet thus — one going in, the other going out—it is almost impossible for them to pass. But for the most part the trenches are well made, and there are miles and miles of these wonderful mazes, in which men burrow like rabbits and give battle to the foe they cannot even see.

One or two companies reach the support trenches and stay there. The rest go steadily on until suddenly they find themselves in the front-line trenches. The firing line, in appearance, is not much different from the other trenches already passed, and more often than not is less dangerous. It looks a business-

like place with the rifles in position for instant use; periscopes that reveal to watchful eyes the doings of the Boches opposite; gongs for warning the men when gas attacks are coming—in which case helmets must be put on without the loss of a second; sentries on guard at special spots; dug-outs, deep and spacious, and surprisingly comfortable, all things considered.

A front-line trench: as quiet and peaceful one minute as though it were a silent valley nestling under the shadow of a mighty mountain; the next minute, and it is a raging, fire-spitting volcano, and as much like hell as anything in this world can be.

. . . . .

The men have not had time to settle down in their new surroundings, or even find their bearings, before there comes a series of terrific explosions. The earth trembles violently, and then is blown into the air mountains high with a roar that is heard miles away. The falling earth

spreads itself like a gigantic pall, and rains down everywhere for some minutes. There is a great gaping hole in the ground; one of the biggest craters seen in the war. The Germans have exploded two or three mines, and a hundred or more brave fellows have been wounded, killed, or buried in the debris.

The cries of the maimed mingle with the appeals of those seeking to extricate themselves from the soil that is strangling what remains of life. Feverishly, digging parties bend to their task, and many are got out in time. A few, alas, are beyond help; some die and remain buried for all time where they fell. The stretcher bearers, ever the Friends of the Wounded, dash forward to assist the injured, and to convey them through the narrow trenches to the dressing station.

Those who have escaped with only badly shaken nerves seize their rifles and prepare to attack the Germans should an effort be made to occupy the crater. But the Boche leaves it alone. He is intent

on other sorts of deadly work. His big guns are in action, and pour forth a continuous stream of high explosive shells. Hour after hour it goes on, and the screaming shells fall on all sides; in the trenches and out of the trenches; on the open roads behind the lines; on peaceful villages and on innocent children; on soldiers and civilians alike. Hand grenades, trench mortars, bombs, rifles, and machine-guns also play their part in the campaign of destruction. It is not one-sided, for the British reply effectively, using similar weapons, and on the whole more of them. It is a duel between Life and Death raging all day—and that day a Sunday.

The men in the trenches fight against these tremendous odds stubbornly, persistently, cheering one another, caring for the wounded, reverently removing the dead, listening to instructions and carrying out orders, and all the time trying to master the fear that grips even the bravest, and to control their sorely tried

nerves. Some men there are who have absolutely no thought for themselves. Their thoughts are for their comrades needing their help or guidance, or are concentrated on the task of repelling the Germans to the exclusion of everything else. Truly a man finds himself in such times as these, and in everyone something of the grand and heroic reveals itself.

At last the fury of the combat spends itself; the batteries no longer roar and thunder, and everything becomes comparatively quiet again. Tired and worn as they are, there is not yet rest for the men in the trenches. Trenches have to be rebuilt in places, and damaged structures must be repaired. There are lots of things to be done as the result of the long and fierce conflict. But the worst is over, and men marvel that they are alive to tell the story of that first full day of responsibility in the firing line. Death, after all, has not reaped a rich harvest. He has threatened, and come near time after time, but on the whole the number

of victims is, in the circumstances, smaller than one dared to hope. The wonder is not that so many are killed, but rather that so many escape amidst the fearful inferno of shells that rages for hours on end.

Still, a number of gallant comrades lie dead under the silent stars, comrades who were full of life and hope when the sun rose that day. They offered their young lives when the call came, and have paid the utmost penalty. It is War, cruel and vindictive, and their blood is the price of peace, righteousness, and justice, based on a true humanity. . . . In the front-line trenches night has fallen, and under its wings sleep the weary soldiers. The fierce conflict of the day is forgotten. But here and there a man tosses to and fro and closes his eyes in vain. Others there are who wake up fretfully, or who shout out strange things in their sleep. They are still haunted by the awfulness of that Sunday in the firing line.

As the morning light breaks a little bird perches on the parapet of a front-line trench and pipes cheerily its song of peace and hope. And throughout that day is heard but seldom the sound of shot and shell, so that men wonder if the events of Sunday were not a dream from which one awakes to find that all is well.

CHAPTER V

THE SPIRIT OF THE TRENCHES

Not long ago a famous general addressed a number of officers at the front. He wore many decorations, but the one of which he was proudest was a V.C. ribbon—the symbol of the highest possible bravery.

"If any man tells you," said this gallant gentleman, "that he feels no fear in the trenches, don't believe him. I confess that I am afraid when I hear the shells whistling about me, and so are all those whom I have asked. But the point is that we must not give way to this natural fear; we must just go on."

That in a nutshell is the secret of the Englishman's success in the trenches. With all his heart he hates shells, grenades, minenwerfers, bombs, and all the deadly

instruments of modern warfare, and wishes the whole affair over. Yet he means to see the job through, and so, in spite of it all, he "just goes on," and will "just go on" until final victory crowns his efforts.

Many great deeds quietly done will never be told, and lots of men will return to civilian life with no special medal or ribbon to show what dauntless courage they exhibited in England's greatest war. And the chances are that you will hear nothing from them. The reticence of the average Tommy about his good deeds is notorious, and—mark of true bravery!—he is hardly conscious he has done anything out of the ordinary. Let me tell a few stories of the trenches, within my own experience, to show the stuff of which the Man-in-the-Trench is made.

First of all, there is the story of the 16th K.R.R. sergeant-major, who, now in England, possesses a D.C.M. medal to cheer him if he feels lonely. Waiting in a front-line trench for the return of a

patrol, he heard a cry of pain in No Man's Land—that dread place of strange secrets between the two sets of trenches.

"That is ——," said the sergeant-major; "I must go to him."

His officer suggested it was too dangerous, and that they had better wait. Again came the cry of a comrade in distress, and hesitating no longer, over the parapet went the N.C.O. On hands and knees he crawled right into the German lines. Here he found a corporal already dead, and the man who had cried out dying. Whilst doing what he could for the latter the Germans turned their machine-guns on the spot, and a bullet hit him in the shoulder. Spent and worn he struggled back in the darkness to his own trenches.

"Don't send anyone else over," were the first words he said; "poor So-and-so is dying."

There was no thought for himself—only the desire to save those who had volunteered to take his place. His efforts were not altogether in vain. Some German

soldiers tended the fatally wounded man, who, however, could not have lived long after receiving his injury. Next morning the Germans put up a notice saying that they had buried the bodies of both men in a reverent and fitting manner. The platoon commander of the men signalled back his thanks. It was worth knowing that the gallant fellows slept in a soldier's grave, honoured, in death at least, by the foe they had fought.

Corporal Blank is an Irishman in the K.R.R. who cannot restrain his Irish humour even in the most critical moments. He had quite an interesting joke at the expense of the crafty Hun, and now wears a D.C.M. ribbon to give point to it. It happened thus: the intrepid corporal was on patrol work when, suddenly, he found himself close to the German trenches. His first thought, he confesses, was to get away as quickly as possible. Second thoughts—and best—suggested that as he was so near he might just as well see the Boche at home and study his domestic

habits. He peeped inside the trench and made a mental note of all he saw. Whilst engaged in this laudable but dangerous occupation he was challenged by a sentry. Thrice the challenge was rapped out, and as there was no reply the sentry fired—and missed.

"Sure, and it's a pity to leave the shooting all to one side," murmured the Irishman as he flung a particularly deadly bomb at the German. Without waiting to inquire after that gentleman's health he literally rolled and tumbled back to his trench, and safety. The information he had gained was so valuable that the Divisional General sent a special message of thanks and a grateful country gave him a D.C.M. He is now contemplating fresh pranks based on his knowledge of the German-at-Home.

Touching is the story of a poor fellow wounded to the death by shrapnel. He lay in an exposed part of a trench and pleaded for someone to hold his hand. For an hour a comrade remained with

him, cheering and supporting him, and ignoring the shells that fell on all sides. Seeing that the end was near, he said the Lord's Prayer slowly. The dying soldier followed him in the various petitions until almost through, when he finished the prayer himself. With the final "Amen" he passed into the Great Unseen, and to the Father to Whom his last earthly appeal had been made.

Forgetfulness of self is the inspiration of all brave deeds. One sees it when the stretcher bearers are at work. The call of a wounded comrade is seldom made in vain. These good friends of the wounded go everywhere, facing manfully almost inconceivable risks, dangers and difficulties. There is one man, for instance, who had done the most courageous acts during a fierce and sustained bombardment.

"Weren't you afraid?" someone asked him.

"Not whilst I was doing my work," came the reply. "Somehow I forgot all

about the shells when I saw the wounded. All I knew was that they wanted me."

As he was carrying out his ordinary duties, such a man may receive no military distinction, but he earns the lasting gratitude and admiration of his comrades.

The Man-in-the-Trench shows a stoicism that in itself is heroic. Here is a man in a front-line trench, only sixty yards from the enemy, and he is calmly shaving, screwing his face this way and that before a little mirror. Further on are a number of men "off duty" (if a man can be said to be "off duty" in the firing line), playing "nap," and so intent on the game that the Germans opposite are completely forgotten. Not far away an enthusiastic angler is actually fishing in a canal that runs by a trench, where a well-known Irishman won his V.C.

During a big "strafe" a man is writing a letter home. No mention is made of the danger he is in. "The weather is much finer," he writes, "and the mud in the trenches is disappearing. Don't forget to

send a few Woodbines, and I hope you are well as it leaves me at present. . . ."

A N.C.O. comes along. "A patrol party is wanted for to-night," he says; "would anybody like to go?"

It means a trip into the mysterious No Man's Land, where strange forms are to be seen, forms that once were men who ventured out and never returned.

"Put me down, sergeant," cry a multitude of voices. Then someone pleads plaintively, "Look here, can't I go? It ain't fair. Buster Brown went last time, and I'm hanged if he isn't down to go again."

"There's a vacancy in the Suicide Club," says Private Smith to his intimate friend Private Jones. "I wish you would try to get it, and then we shall be together again."

"Right O, I'm on it," answers Jones; "anything for a quiet life and a cushy job."

A little later, and he has joined the Suicide Club, the name playful Mr. Atkins

has bestowed on the noble fraternity of bombers.

Here is another man who has struggled through long lines of trenches feet deep in mud. He has stuck fast more than once, and in extricating himself has lost a gum boot. He shakes the mud off the remaining boot, and as he does so turns to a companion and remarks cheerfully, "And yet they say over in England, Bill, that we haven't gained any ground!"

The Boche has put up a notice, and Mr. Atkins reads it attentively.

"What is this?" he cries, and looks again. He takes his cigarette from his mouth and whistles.

"Listen to this, mates"—he addresses the men round him, glues his eyes to the periscope, and reads the notice aloud slowly—"'Lieutenant Hardhitter and the six men of the —— who were with him are now prisoners in our trench. Further visitors will be warmly welcomed.' Say, mates, what do you think of that?"

"Sounds like a bloomin' invitation to

afternoon tea," chuckled the lance-corporal. "I think I'll pay them a friendly visit and try their sausages."

"When will you go, corporal?" asked the man at the periscope.

"When they've called here and introduced themselves proper like," said the corporal. Then everybody laughed.

Young England has been tried in the trenches, and has stood the test. The heart of Young England is sound. And that is why, perhaps, those at the front believe that the best days of England are yet to come.

CHAPTER VI

THE RED HARVEST OF WAR

THE Old Campaigner was looking a little older and greyer as he stretched himself wearily on the much-worn sofa. He was just back from the first spell in the trenches, and there was something in the eyes that showed he had seen strange and dreadful things, and had lived laborious days and nights.

"Give me a match, somebody," he said, producing a pipe. He lit up and puffed away peacefully for some minutes.

"War," he said at last, taking the pipe from his mouth, "is hell. Dante's 'Inferno' seems a mild place in comparison with the trenches during a real downright bombardment."

"I'm inclined to agree, sir," put in the Senior Sub., adding with a smile, "The

sooner we get back to that happy-go-lucky Wandering Jew existence, the better for us all."

The O.C. sent a cloud of tobacco smoke into the air.

"No," he said decidedly, "I still remain an impenitent Athenian."

"Which being interpreted means——?" ventured the Man-who-always-asks-questions.

"That I am always on the look out for some new thing."

"You've got it in this war then, sir, haven't you?" inquired the Senior Sub.

"No again!" rapped out the Old Campaigner, with some of his old fire. "This war is just a dish-up of all big wars fought since the days of ancient Greece and Rome. Read up your history, my boy, and judge for yourself."

The Senior Sub. shrugged his shoulders. Books made no strong appeal to him. A Red Cross ambulance car went noiselessly past, and he caught sight of it through the open window. "Hullo!" he cried;

"there's a lucky beggar on his way to hospital and, perhaps, to Blighty. O to be in Blighty when the sun shines bright," he finished inconsequently.

In a moment everybody was talking of "Blighty"—the soldier's name for England—and the wounded men who were going there. It was agreed that these warriors were fortunate indeed to be free of the trenches, and that a few weeks at home would work greater wonders than all the magic and skill of modern science.

It is because there is a prospect of returning to England that the wounded are more envied than pitied. And it is the same thought that keeps a man, stricken sore by the enemy, smiling and cheerful. Here is a poor fellow with painful wounds in the leg and back. He lies on a stretcher in a dug-out dressing station, and the doctor examines him quickly and applies the necessary bandages. The man moans, and the medico is sympathetic, as he understands how severe the pain is.

"Does that hurt?" he asks, as he moves the soldier more gently.

"Only a bit, sir," answers the man, stifling a groan.

"Right O. You're a lucky chap."

The man looks up inquiringly.

"Next week, my lad," says the doctor cheerily, "you'll be in Blighty."

The man's whole attitude changes. "I've got a Blighty, old sport," he cries to his pal, who has come to carry him through the trenches to the ambulance car. "That's a bit of orlright, ain't it? Give us a cigarette; light it for me. Thanks. Blighty in a week. Crikey!"

He makes a triumphant exit, and that night, as he sleeps in a comfortable hospital bed, with beautifully clean sheets, he counts the hours that must pass before the boat takes him over the waters back to England. He is supremely happy, and the pain and the wounds are forgotten.

Many wounded there are, of course, who do not return to England. They remain in a hospital in France, and are

won back to health and strength and the trenches by the best possible medical skill and attention. The R.A.M.C. arrangements are adequate and wonderful. From firing line to the base, many miles behind the trenches, is a great chain of dressing stations and hospitals. The sick and wounded are passed from one to the other by means of a system that works smoothly and brings fruitful results. Men battered and broken in the war merit the tenderest and most thorough treatment. As far as is humanly possible they get it out in Flanders. Doctors, nurses, chaplains, attendants, give of their best to the heroes struck down in the fight. All honour to them for it.

After the trenches men appreciate the roomy, well-ventilated wards of a hospital, with flowers, fresh cut each day, placed beside their beds, and a bright array of pictures on the walls to catch the eye and gladden the heart. There is little lack of books, and magazines and cigarettes and good food. Mr. Atkins finds

it easy to grow well again in such pleasant surroundings, and recovery, as a rule, is speedy and sure. . . . But, alas, not all recover, and Death is ever busy in hospitals near the trenches, and elsewhere. The last moments of those who die thus are watched by doctor and chaplain alike, and both, in their own way, do what they can to strengthen and solace the soldier in his final struggle.

Afterwards comes one of the saddest things to be seen at the front—the burial of the dead. Simplicity marks the service throughout; there is little or no ceremony, but there is much solemnity and reverence and real respect for the comrade who has given up life and all at the call of duty.

In the cemeteries just behind the trenches, burials take place at night. No light is shown, so as to avoid attracting the enemy's fire, and everything is done as quietly as possible. One might have thought that ground consecrated to the heroic dead would escape wanton destruction. But it is not so. Not long ago a

chaplain was killed whilst taking a burial service, and shells are dropped into more than one cemetery at irregular intervals. Wherever possible, a man is buried by a chaplain of the Church to which he belongs. Men from the same battalion are generally present, and take their share in the last sad rites.

And here let me pay a tribute to our soldiers at the front. Nothing can exceed their reverence and care for fallen comrades. They spare no pain and effort to have them buried in the Soldiers' Cemetery, and with the recognized funeral service. At the risk of their own lives they venture over the parapet into No Man's Land to bring back the body of a friend, and no matter how wearied and tired they may be, they will dig a grave and tend it afterwards. Men will walk miles just to see the grave of one they have known, and they will face shells and death to pay their last honours at his burial.

There is, perhaps, nothing more touching than the delicate compliment the soldier

pays to the dead. He says little, strangely little, but his deeds are eloquent of much to those with eyes to see and a heart to understand. He always insists on a cross being placed over every grave, even though the grave is actually in the trenches. With reason he is proud of the English Soldiers' Cemeteries to be found in so many parts of France. It is clear that they are well looked after, and, indeed, everything possible is done to make them worthy of the great and faithful dead who died that England might live. On every cross—the symbol of the victory of Life over Death and the eternal triumph of the Risen Christ—is given the name, number, regiment, and date of death of the man who sleeps beneath that hallowed soil. The whole scene is suggestive of peace and confidence, and will surely bring solace to hearts that bleed for husbands, sons, and brothers.

England cares much for her soldiers, and will bestow rewards on those who return with the honours of war. But Eng-

land also is not unmindful of those who have fallen. Their burial-place shall suggest something of the debt she owes to these faithful warrior sons, and proclaim the abiding truth that they did not die in vain. Throughout the generations to come their deeds shall be told in sepulchral stone and song and story, and they shall live in the imperishable memory of a country that never forgets her bravest and her best.

CHAPTER VII

A CHURCHMAN'S BATTALION

THE British army deals fairly with all religions, and during the war has treated the different denominations with such sympathy and consideration that most men at the Front have an opportunity of attending services such as they have been used to at home. Church of England, Roman Catholics, Nonconformists, Salvation Army, Jews, etc., each have their own chaplains, who visit their men and make spiritual provision for them. In every Brigade is a Church of England, Roman Catholic, and Nonconformist chaplain, with an extra chaplain for the denomination most strongly represented. It does not often happen that all the men in a battalion profess the same faith ; but there is one case on record at least. The 16th K.R.R. claim that every man is a member of the Church of

England, and that one must go back to the brave days of Crecy and Agincourt for a precedent. It is known as the Churchman's Battalion, and religion is the mainspring of its patriotism, courage, and devotion. About 75 per cent. of the men are communicants, men who know their Faith, and are not ashamed to confess it. Not that they set themselves up as better than their neighbours. They are no prigs, and their failings are patent to the world. But they are real men in the best sense. Like General Gordon, Lord Roberts and others of England's heroes, they believe that character formed by prayer and sacrament and the Christian virtues is the highest and the noblest. So they practise their religion at the front, and are the better for it.

It is their first Sunday in France, and the church bells ring out in the early morning calling the people to worship. A number of officers and men make their way to a stable—their church for the day. Here the Holy Communion is celebrated,

and the little band of the faithful are irresistibly reminded of the first Christmas Day, when the Babe of Bethlehem was born. The altar is a rude wooden box placed in the manger. Over it is spread a fair linen cloth, and upon it are placed a crucifix and candlesticks. There are no seats, and the congregation kneels on the straw-lined floor and receives Him Who made a stable the Home of a King.

In the evening the building is full of soldiers who have come to Flanders to fight, and some of them to die. They join in the familiar words of Evensong and sing the old psalms and hymns. Before the Blessing they kneel, and sing softly that touching hymn—

> "Holy Father, in Thy mercy
> Hear our anxious prayer,
> Keep our loved ones, now far absent,
> 'Neath Thy care . . ."

and are linked with the people at home—many of whom were singing and praying it at or about the same time. Thus did

our modern Sir Galahad consecrate himself afresh on that first Sunday in France.

Some days later came exciting news. The first platoon (roughly sixty men) were to go into the trenches for instructional purposes. They were to be followed by the rest of the platoons in turn until all had been initiated into the mysteries of the firing line. Danger and death had to be faced, and it was natural, therefore, that men desired to make their communion before setting out. So the altar, with its simple ornaments, was set up again, and those men, who were going to the trenches the following morning, flocked into the barn or stable or loft, or into whatever modest building the service was held.

"I believe in God the Father . . . And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come." The strong declaration of faith is spoken confidently by all. The confession of sins is said humbly, and the comforting words of Absolution follow.

In solemn silence the men kneel before their priest.

"The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee," he whispers to each one, "preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life."

Refreshed with the Living Bread, the soldiers go back to make ready for an early start to the trenches. The whole battalion completed the instructional training without mishap, and not a few made their next communion a holy thanksgiving.

Christmas Day saw the K.R.R. resting in a French village.

"What are you going to do, Padre, about the Christmas services?" asked the Old Campaigner, as stalwart a Churchman as he is a soldier. "No barn, loft, or stable will do this time. There's a school down the road that should suit. Why not interview the schoolmistress?"

A good idea. The Padre finds the schoolmistress kind, friendly, and obliging. She speaks English well, and says

she learned it as a child in England itself. Oh, yes, she likes England, and are not the soldiers fighting to protect her beloved France? Readily she placed the schoolroom at the disposal of the men, and on Christmas morning they found she had decorated it and written in English on the blackboard the old greeting—"A Happy Christmas."

At midnight the first communion was celebrated, and over 100 soldiers began the Christmas Day by giving welcome to Him Whose birthday it was. There were three more celebrations of the Holy Communion as well as a Parade Service, and, all told, some 400 men made their communion, whilst the school children looked in through the windows and wondered about the big English soldiers who had squeezed themselves into the small scholars' seats. In later days they will understand, and will tell of the warriors who worshipped there, because they were pledged to the Prince of Peace.

One thinks of another village school

on a certain Sunday less than a month later. The battalion had returned from the first long spell in the trenches, and many gallant comrades have been left behind. Every man knows now what war means, how cruel are its instruments, and how near is Death to those who fight. Hearts have been touched and men have become more thoughtful, even though there is a brave pretence at indifference and the usual gaiety.

Matins has been said, but few have come to take part in it.

"It's a bit disappointing," the Padre confides to the Old Campaigner. "I expected most of the men would welcome this opportunity for a service."

"Wait," is all the O.C. says.

Holy Communion is to follow Matins, and there is a short interval. Men begin to pour into the school.

"Here is your congregation," whispers the O.C., with a smile.

Soon the room is filled. Still men come, scores of them. They remain bareheaded

in the school yard, and standing there, join in the hymns and prayers with those inside until the actual time of communion. Then they press their way to the altar, and having received the sacred elements, pass out again to wait in the open air until the service is over.

At night the schoolroom is filled to the door again. Mr. Atkins loves to sing, and he likes to be consulted in the selection of the hymns. He chooses them all this night, but the one which is demanded generally, and which is sung with the most fervour, is "For ever with the Lord" —the first verse expressing accurately, perhaps, the minds of the men—

"'For ever with the Lord!'
  Amen; so let it be;
Life from the dead is in that word,
  'Tis immortality.
Here in the body pent,
  Absent from Him I roam,
Yet nightly pitch my moving tent
  A day's march nearer home."

Those who were present will not soon

forget the services of that day, nor those of Easter Day, 1916. The first Easter celebration of the Holy Communion took place in a loft, moderately large, but not nearly large enough to accommodate all who came. It was necessary for men to make their communion, and then pass out to give place to the many communicants standing outside. Later in the morning there was a Parade Service in a theatre capable of holding 1000 men, and it was quite full. It was followed by Holy Communion, when nearly 300 soldiers made their act of faith in the Risen Christ, and received Him to the strengthening of their souls. Some men were there who had been confirmed in the room above a few days previously, and are able to say that they were confirmed and made their first communion in a theatre in regular use for the entertainment of those at the front. Between 500 and 600 officers and men of the 16th K.R.R. made their Easter communion, whilst the guns roared and

thundered only a mile or two away: a memorable Easter truly, and one long to be remembered.

Sufficient has been said to show that the K.R.R. may claim to be a battalion of Soldier-Churchmen in more than name only. Credit for this must largely go to the C.L.B., which trained them in the critical years of youth and kept them honest and true until early manhood, and then brought them together for the service of their country. The C.L.B. has 120,000 old members in the Army and Navy. But nowhere has it been better served nor its ideals more clearly expressed than amongst those first thousand men who made up the now familiar Churchman's Battalion.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DEEDS OF HEROES

An officer who had been wounded returned to the front just in time for a big engagement. A friend expressed sympathy that he should so soon have to risk his life again. "It's all in the day's work, dear boy," he said, with a smile; and then, as he prepared to move off to the firing line, he added, "After all, it's what we came out for."

Fighting is the soldier's business, and out in France there are few who shirk it, however hard and unpleasant conditions may be. There are many cases on record where officers and men, given the chance to remain behind, have pleaded successfully to take their places with the fighting men, and in attacks they have been the first over the parapet.

The C.L.B. Battalion can boast of many such heroes. The fact that some fifty military awards and distinctions have been won during the first year in Flanders is proof of this. Owing to the necessarily rigid Censor restrictions it is not possible at present to recount all the names and deeds of those who have won their spurs on the battlefield. But a few examples may be given to show what has been done.

The first officer to gain the Military Cross was Lieutenant Cork. A party of men from his company, under two officers, had volunteered to make a raid on a German trench. Everything was carried out according to programme and the Boches spent an uncomfortable hour. They turned their machine-guns on the gallant raiders as the latter were returning to their own trenches, and a few men fell. Realizing the danger, Lieutenant Cork went out into No Man's Land, rallied the raiding party, and carried in some of the wounded. It was a brave deed worthily done.

Another Military Cross went to Captain

Donaldson, who has displayed conspicuous courage on many occasions. Severely wounded during the course of an important attack, he refused to leave the field. He continued at the head of his company, inspiring and encouraging them, and would not have his wounds dressed until the work had been completed.

Other heroes there were who, alas! paid the penalty of their heroism with their lives. All K.R.R. men tell the story of Major C——, who so gallantly led the battalion into action on one of the red-letter days of the war. Hit by a bullet, he fell to the ground mortally wounded; but his only thought was for his men. "Charge on, men!" he cried, "charge on!" Almost as he spoke the dauntless spirit was at rest. The soldiers, however, had heard the dying command, and they went on and on until their object was accomplished. It was on the same fateful day that Lieut. H——, shot in the ankle, refused to go away from the fighting. "I must go on with my men," he said. He

stumbled on until a bullet in the head killed him instantly. There was no gentler nor finer character than his.

The story also of Captain D—— will long be told where brave men foregather. "I want you," he said to his men before an action, the most severe they had faced, "I want you to act as though you were on your old parade-ground in England, when we took part in attacks with no real enemy in front of us." It was no easy task, with machine-guns never silent for a single minute. But he gave them the lead. He went before his men as if indeed he were on his own parade-ground. His infectious example of cool daring made it difficult not to follow him, and when he fell, his followers never faltered: they went straight on.

Led by such officers—and the regret is that many more stirring tales of their doings may not yet be told—it is no surprise to learn that N.C.O.s and men have given signal proof of high courage on many occasions. In the chapter on "The

Spirit of the Trenches" it is related how the first two D.C.M.s were won. It is interesting to note that both Sergt.-Major Hamilton and Corporal Bothwell are Irishmen who joined the battalion together from Portrush, and were placed in the same platoon. These old friends obtained the D.C.M. during their second visit to the trenches.

A third D.C.M. was obtained by Corporal Rock, in the early days at the Front, for an outstanding act of devotion to duty. He continued to work a machine-gun after all his comrades had been struck down, and he kept on until relieved, although badly wounded himself.

It is good also to hear of Lance-Corporal Scott, whose work amongst the wounded has brought him a Military Medal and the praise and goodwill of all true men. He has not heeded danger when beneficent acts of mercy had to be done.

What words of commendation are sufficient for the hero who went out as guide six times over the most dangerous ground

and never once faltered or turned back? Hit at last, he lay fatally wounded and refused to let the stretcher-bearers touch him. "I am dying," he said. "Don't trouble about me, go and look after the others."

Another wounded man crept out of his shelter to bandage a comrade also in pain, and was killed in his act of mercy. There was another hero who went to meet death with a smile. Waiting for the end to come, he turned to his friends who were with him. "I'm going to say my prayers," he whispered, "and then I'll sing you the old song"—he named a song he had often sung—"for the last time."

This chapter contains only examples of the brave deeds done by men of the K.R.R. during their first year in France. But they show, as no words possibly can, the spirit that has animated all ranks alike. It is good to remember that many brave men will never wear a ribbon or a medal to remind the world of their special acts of courage. You may find them, not a few, in the ranks of the Churchman's Battalion.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIUMPH OF RELIGION

THE C.L.B. Battalion has been tried in the furnace of bitter affliction and has stood the test. It has justified all the confident hopes placed in it. It has proved —if proof were needed—that the *moral* that springs from faith in the Risen Christ counts for much, and that, allied to physical fitness, it is practically irresistible. Churchmen may well be proud of their own battalion.

It is worth noting that as the worn and battered warriors came back one day after some of the hardest fighting on record, almost the first thing they saw was a large crucifix standing out amidst the black ruins of the place. It was quite untouched. The tender eyes of the Christ seemed to look with pity and

encouragement on the soldier Churchmen as they passed by. "See," they whispered, "the crucifix alone remains untouched." And thereat they gained fresh hope. The parable of the Untouched Crucifix is teaching new lessons day after day in many parts of France.

* * * * *

How the battalion strikes others may be seen from two typical extracts, one from a speech by Lord Grenfell in the House of Lords, the other from a letter written by a Rifleman to his mother.

"When the war broke out," said Lord Grenfell, "I asked Lord Kitchener if he would permit me to raise a battalion from the ex-members of the Church Lads' Brigade. He said he would be glad. In a few days I had offers of 2000. Out of them I was able to form one of the finest battalions of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, which I served in, and of which this battalion now forms a part. This battalion, I regret to say, was diminished in strength

during a recent attack. But I am glad to say it behaved with the greatest possible gallantry. I do not mention this as anything peculiar, because every battalion of the New Armies has behaved in that gallant way; still, it is a great satisfaction to those who have taken an interest in the Church Lads' Brigade to know that those men drawn from its ranks should have behaved in such a gallant manner."

The extract from the letter written by the Rifleman to his mother describes his feelings in a big action. He was killed himself the day after writing the letter.

"I scarcely know, mother, how I came out alive; but I did. It was grand to see the boys go over; not one faltered; straight onward they went. I looked down the line several times, and it was always the same. One thing is certain, the C.L.B. will always be proud of its boys. Those who have gone under have done their bit, and done it well. Their names will go down to history."

* * * * *

One of the saddest things that falls to the lot of the chaplains at the front is the writing of letters of consolation and sympathy to those who have lost loved ones. But even this has its bright side. It is not too much to say that the heroism of our soldiers on the field has been matched by the heroism of the women at home—especially the mothers and wives and sisters and sweethearts who may not hope to see their soldier boys again this side of the grave. The writer has been much impressed by the touching replies he has had to his messages of sympathy. The majority of these (for the most part written by the mothers of the men of the 16th K.R.R., and so, worthy to come in this record of the deeds of heroes) are tender and human documents. Pride in those who have fallen is the dominant note.

"I am a proud but broken-hearted mother," wrote one.

"I cannot say I am sorry that he fought

for his country," said another, "but I do not know how I shall face the future without him. I am a widow, and he was a good, faithful, and only son."

"We think with pride of what they did," wrote one of six sisters about her two brothers who had been killed at the same time and were buried in the same grave. "And we are glad to remember that as in life they were, like Jonathan and David, always together, in death also they are not divided."

There are many more letters in the same strain. All are marked by womanly pride in the men who rest in soldiers' graves, resignation, a wonderful spirit of unselfishness, and an absolute faith in the Life Beyond and the hope that looks forward to the eternal reunion in the Paradise of God. To all mourners the words of Baring Gould's popular hymn must come with renewed and uplifting power—

"Through the night of doubt and sorrow
  Onward goes the pilgrim band,
Singing songs of expectation,
  Marching to the Promised Land.

. . . . . .

Soon shall come the great awaking,
  Soon the rending of the tomb;
Then the scattering of all shadows,
  And the end of toil and gloom."

CHAPTER X

SOME GENERAL IMPRESSIONS

After a year at the front it is possible to set down some impressions. But it is not easy. One is really too near the scene of events—perhaps the most momentous in the secular history of the world—to judge impartially, and ideas are apt to be governed by the accidents of the situation rather than by the actual facts themselves. Still, it may be of interest to summarize some of the main impressions left on the mind after twelve months' experience of the fighting zone in Flanders. They are given for what they may be worth.

The Man-who-always-asks-questions has reported that when he inquires, "Is the war anything like what you thought it to be before you left England?" the almost

invariable reply is, "No; it is altogether different." The war of imagination differs widely from the war of reality. A great deal of a soldier's time is spent, not in the trenches, but out of the trenches. Often he is in reserve or in rest billets some miles behind the firing line, and on such occasions he is apt to doubt if there is any serious conflict going on. It is not too much to say that the war is almost forgotten when one loses that close personal touch that life in the trenches brings. Even in the front line there are periods of quietude and cessation from hostilities, so that men ask, "Are we really at war?" It is not the picture painted when training in England. Nor is it a poetic flight of the imagination to write of birds singing in No Man's Land—that happens frequently. War is not a series of fiercely sustained and practically unceasing bombardments day and night; and the fighting man does not spend even the major part of his time in battling with the enemy. This may help to account for the cheer-

fulness of Mr. Atkins. He forgets or ignores the big "strafe" he may have received in the trenches when he leaves the trenches.

War is a business, and like the successful business man the soldier puts aside all his worries and anxieties as soon as the work is over. Theatres, well within sound of the guns, are full night after night, and boxing contests, concerts, football matches, and so on, form the regular recreation of the men back from the firing line. But there is the other side of the picture. If war is not so bad in some respects as many imagine, it is worse in others. The actual horrors of modern warfare cannot be described. No one who has taken part in a real bombardment or assault wishes to repeat the experience. It has been said, "Seventy-five per cent. of war is, more or less, endurable, but the rest is hell." One may well leave it at that.

All who have been to the front pay tribute to the splendid spirit of the men.

The cheerfulness of the average soldier is wonderful. It is sometimes said that he is too cheerful; that he does not take the job seriously enough. The criticism is not sound. Light-hearted and irresponsible though he apparently is, Mr. Atkins is all there when, as he describes it, he is "up against it," when real fighting and hard work have to be done, and dangers and difficulties faced.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell has suggested that the British soldier is cheerful, and makes the best of things, because it is his idea of playing the game. Good judges will agree. Sometimes a man complains that people at home may misunderstand the accounts they read of the cheerfulness prevailing abroad, and think that the soldier is having a "soft time." "If there be any such, let them think so," whispered someone who knew; "they do not count for much in the scheme of things."

In his letters to relatives and friends Tommy invariably makes light of the

hardships, and discusses at length the pleasant side of life. He loves above all things to receive letters and parcels, and yet there are many cases where he has asked that parcels should not be sent to him because of the expense of postage. "I do not really need them," he adds; "we are well fed and looked after out here." This strictly is the cold truth, but only those who have seen the pleasure a parcel or a letter brings can appreciate the spirit of the man who dispassionately declares it. When a parcel does arrive it is shared out. In this respect Thomas is a pronounced Socialist, and never more so than up in the trenches, when gifts from home help to make the whole day bright, and the postman who delivers them is regarded as a kind of beneficent fairy in khaki.

Sociable, friendly, with loyalty to a pal as a sacred part of his code of honour, Mr. Atkins is always ready to lend a helping hand, and is chivalrous, good-natured, and a philosopher of the type:

take-things-as-they-come-it-all-goes-in with-the-shilling-a-day-and-we-are-out-to do-our-bit. Touching the war he does not say much. He wishes it was over, and that he was settled in "Blighty" again. But he wants, so he says, to see the job through, and hopes that this war will lead to an assured and lasting peace. A good, thorough-going Englishman is the soldier at the front, and worthy of the best the country can give him.

The man in the ranks has great respect for the officers who lead him, and rightly so too. The average English officer is, perhaps, the best in the world. What he lacks in specialized military knowledge he makes up in natural qualities of leadership. "He is a sport," says Tommy, meaning thereby all that is included in the familiar phrase, "An officer and a gentleman."

The officers at the front have proved that the manhood of England will bear favourable comparison with that of the bravest days of the past. For the most

part trained in our universities, public schools, or good grammar schools, the officers of the New Army have taken up work, practically entirely new to them, with enthusiasm, devotion, and success. Their school training has taught them discipline, the recognition of authority, and also how to command. They get the best out of their men, and are respected and liked. The relationship existing between officer and man is one of mutual goodwill and confidence.

"We are all comrades in arms," said one of our most famous generals recently. "From the humblest private to the highest general we are at one in our desire to do our bit for the old country, and in this respect at least we are brothers and equals."

Like Mr. Atkins the officer keeps cheerful; his sang-froid carries him through difficult situations with undisturbed equanimity; he throws his cares to the wind on those occasions when he can forget all about the trenches and fighting by a visit

to a theatre, followed by a good dinner in a French hotel, and the convivial companionship of brother officers.

England has reason to be proud of the leaders in the Army, many of them straight from school and college, and all alike in their keenness to learn their duties, and do their best, even at the cost of limb and life, for the country they love and serve.

What of religion at the front? It may be said at once, however unpalatable it may be, that there has been no religious revival in the ordinary sense. It is a mistake to think that the majority of the men are wildly enthusiastic over eternal and spiritual realities, or that there has been a multitude of "conversions." The Englishman abroad is pretty much like the Englishman at home. In regard to the deep and more intimate things of life he is by nature and temperament shy and reserved. The more he feels a thing the less inclined he is to talk about it. This is an obvious platitude, not worth the saying, except as a re-

minder that one must not be disappointed to find men, even in the face of death, reticent about their religious faith and practice.

It has been said that if there is no religious revival at the front there is a revival about religion. That, it seems to the writer, is the truth of the matter. Men are interested in religion as never before. Is there a God? Will prayer be answered? What is the deep mystery of Holy Communion? Why does a man want to pray in the moment of great danger? Is a comrade done with when he has been stitched in his blanket and buried under the soil? What does the cross above the grave mean? Is there life after death, or is this life all? These and sundry questions are in the hearts and minds of men, even though tangible expression is not always given to them.

Indifference and antagonism to religion no longer lift their heads. Fair play all round seems to be the motto. "If you have anything vital to say we shall be

delighted to hear it. If you haven't, we know you are a good sort, and that you are trying to help us, and we respect you for it." This seems to be the general attitude of officers and men to the official representatives—the Padres as they are called—of religion.

Of course, it is true to say that many have been won back to their religious faith, and especially to the recognition of God and the power of prayer, through the war. Many a Prodigal Son has returned home, and many an Elder Brother has got rid of his narrowness of vision and gained a deeper insight into what is eternal and unchangeable. But one must not press this too far, nor even the fact —and it is a fact—that nearly every man facing death in the trenches, instinctively utters a prayer. The writer has not yet come across a man who does not confess to this, and the experience of other chaplains is the same.

Religion is on its trial; vital Christianity is being tested as never before since the

early days of propaganda and persecution; party shibboleths and shams are being ruthlessly exposed in the religious as in the political and social world; and men are demanding Reality, Reality. If the Church gets back to the heart of things and sounds the deep, stern note of Reality in Faith and Creed and Practice, it will capture the men of our great Empire, and nothing shall be able to stem its victorious advance over the whole wide world. Please God it may be so.

"Who are the bravest people in the war?" someone asked the other day. A soldier made reply: "The mothers, wives, sisters, and sweethearts in England." Few will gainsay it. Much has been said about the heroic qualities of the men willingly giving their best at the call of country. Why are tongues so strangely silent about those who readily gave with no mention of the breaking hearts their sons and husbands and brothers? "I am a broken-hearted but proud mother," has been written scores of times by

those whose sons shall return no more to them.

"There should be thousands of V.C.s given away," said a soldier recently.

"To whom?" was asked.

"To the women at home," came the ready answer, "because they best deserve them."

CHAPTER XI

FROM AN OFFICER'S DIARY

THESE extracts "From an Officer's Diary" have been added in the hope that they may be of interest and use to those who desire to have a short record of the Churchman's Battalion during the training in England. The Diary covers the period between September 1914 and November 1915.

* * * * *

Soon after the war commenced, Field-Marshal Lord Grenfell, P.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G., undertook (with the consent of the War Office) to raise a special battalion from past and present members of the Church Lads' Brigade. Offers to serve came from all parts of Great Britain and Ireland, and in September 1914 the 16th (S) Battalion, King's Royal Rifle

Corps (C.L.B.) was formed, and began its training at Denham in Buckinghamshire.

* * * * *

Lieut.-Colonel C. Kindersley Porcher (of the Coldstream Guards) was in command; Major C. Wyld (of the Coldstream Guards) was Second in Command; and Major F. Sitwell (of the Durham Light Infantry) was Adjutant.

* * * * *

Officers and men were billeted in Denham and Uxbridge until the Camp huts were completed in November.

* * * * *

Training went on systematically, and (helped, perhaps, by the knowledge of drill and discipline gained in the C.L.B.) progress was rapid. When the time came for the men to fire their shooting course, they proved remarkably proficient and reached the highest average in the Division.

* * * * *

In January 1915 the battalion was inspected by the Archbishop of Canterbury,

with whom was Lord Grenfell. The Primate, congratulating the men on their smartness, addressed them as the only exclusively Churchman's Battalion in the British Army, and the first of its kind since the days of Crecy and Agincourt.

* * * * *

In March the battalion was billeted in Rayleigh and Thundersley, in Essex, and had special training in trench digging, night operations, etc. Here the men exchanged the blue dress for khaki, and were equipped with rifles and swords.

* * * * *

When the time came to leave Rayleigh, nearly all the inhabitants turned out to show their respect for the officers and men, amongst whom they had made many firm and lasting friendships.

* * * * *

Returning to Denham for a month, the battalion was then sent to Clipstone Park, Nottinghamshire, for Brigade training. On its departure from Denham the Uxbridge Urban District Council passed

a resolution of goodwill to the 16th K.R.R., and placed on record their appreciation of the character, courtesy, and conduct of the men during the whole of their stay in the district. Similar compliments have come from other quarters.

* * * * *

During the summer Lieut.-Colonel Kindersley Porcher had to resign on account of ill-health, and Major Wyld was given command of the battalion. Captain H. Taylor was also obliged to leave the battalion owing to a serious breakdown. He died at his own home a few weeks later.

* * * * *

In August the battalion went to Perham Down, Salisbury Plain, and here the final training was completed, and all arrangements made for the departure of the troops to France on November 16.

* * * * *

The excerpts that follow (taken from *The Brigade*—the official magazine of the C.L.B.) need no explanation.

THE RECTORY, RAYLEIGH, ESSEX.
1st June, 1915.

I AM sure it will be a pleasure to you to hear how excellent has been the conduct of the men of the Battn. K.R.R. (C.L.B) during the time they have been here in this parish. The inhabitants upon whom they have been billeted have nothing but words of praise for them, and from my personal observation and inquiry I can state that the town has been as quiet and free from drunkenness during their presence here as when no troops are with us. Their attachment to their Church has been to me most pleasant to see, a very large number of men being always present at our Sunday evening services, and many regular communicants.

Their Chaplain (Rev. J. Duncan) took the greatest interest in the social and spiritual welfare of the men, and it was very evident that they, on their side, much appreciated this. It is with real regret we saw them leave for Denham a fortnight ago.

A. G. FRYER, *Rector.*

THE RECTORY, THUNDERSLEY, ESSEX.
10th July, 1915.

I HAVE been intending to write to you for some time past, but in addition to being a bad correspondent, I have been an invalid, so that must be my excuse.

I have wanted to thank you for raising such a splendid battalion of the K.R.R.s. I can speak from experience, for their sojourn amongst us gave universal pleasure, and true were the regrets when the K.R.R.s moved elsewhere. Their conduct was beyond praise; it sounds possibly exaggerated, but I speak but the truth. As a congregation they were exemplary, and they made for me the service a delight, and I shall remember their stay with gratification, for they proved, if proof were needed, that a spiritual training makes men helpful, chivalrous, and manly. We mention the officers and men of the K.R.R. in our regular prayers for those who are at the front now or who have offered themselves to go, and shall continue to do so.

I personally consider it was a great privilege to minister to such men whilst they were staying here. May God bless and prosper them and the Church Lads' Brigade.

J. N. TALFOURD MAJOR, *Rector.*

* * * * *

THE MOUNT, HAREFIELD ROAD, UXBRIDGE.
22nd March, 1915.

To the Officer Commanding
Battalion K.R.R.C.

I AM urged to send a message of greeting and goodwill from the townsfolk of Uxbridge to the splendid fellows under your command who have lately been stationed at Denham Camp.

Many (very many) have been the expressions of satisfaction with the general good conduct of the men of the K.R.R. and their smart military bearing.

On behalf of the inhabitants of Uxbridge and the district it gives me considerable pleasure in sending this letter, conveying to the officers and men the warmest of farewell greeting, with best wishes for all

needful health and strength to carry forward to a successful issue whatever experience they may have in future days.

With a personal God-speed,

Believe me, Yours sincerely,

(*Signed*) W. J. HUTCHINGS,

Chairman, Urban District Council.

* * * * *

Before the Depôt Company removed from Denham there was a celebration of the Holy Communion which, in many respects, was unique. The altar and furniture had been removed from the hut that had served so long as the Camp Church, and everything had to be improvised. A table from the hospital served as an altar; a rude cross was fashioned by a rifleman, and flowers were obtained from one of the men's huts. In the early morning 160 out of the 200 men in Camp came for their Communion. Many knelt throughout, for seating accommodation was limited. But reverence and earnestness marked the whole service. Sweetly and solemnly rang out the words—

"The King of Love my Shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His,
And He is mine for ever."

Then before their King knelt these soldiers, testifying to the Faith within them, and receiving the Bread of Life that makes men strong. As they silently filed out of the tent when all was over, one felt certain that most of them would serve with faithful courage and high hope God and country in the days of trial that lay ahead. It was a worthy last Holy Communion in a Church that had become dear and a source of spiritual inspiration to many.

* * * * *

The C.L.B. may be forgiven if it claims its share in the success of the K.R.R. There is no doubt that the training received in the drill-rooms of the C.L.B. Companies up and down the country is bearing fruit. This shows itself not so much in military knowledge—although this is not to be despised, as many competent

judges bear witness—as in the character and tone of the men. Steady, trustworthy, high-spirited and reliable, they build upon the strong rock of the Christian Faith. Here it is the C.L.B. finds its justification. It has won lads for the Church and kept them *as men* in the Church. The result is seen in the C.L.B., K.R.R.C., with its sense of duty, discipline, and honour. Its morale and fighting qualities are of the best because they spring from an unconquerable attachment to the Living Christ. The C.L.B. has had no small share in fostering this.

An impressive incident occurred at a social held in the sergeants' mess a week or two ago. The fun was fast and furious. Song followed song, and story followed story, until the whole atmosphere was charged with electric gaiety. Suddenly the Church bell rang out the signal for the three minutes' silence for prayer throughout the Camp. Instantly there was a solemn silence, not broken until the bell pealed again. It was the re-

minder of all that the C.L.B., K.R.R.C. stands for, and pointed to one of the secrets of its strength. *Ora et labora.* Prayer and work make for sovereign power.

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